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the magazine for Whitefriars' tenants and leaseholders
issue 11

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**New Year
New Home
New Start**



business for neighbourhoods

Up-to-date with your rent?

You could win £500 through our Rent Reward Scheme

Every three months we hold a prize draw for everyone with an up-to-date rent account.

There are two £500 prizes and 10 £100 prizes to be won in each draw - divided equally between winners drawn from Whitefriars South and from Whitefriars North.

The scheme is open to all residential tenants, including hostel residents and tenants who receive Housing Benefit. Entry is limited to one per household.

To qualify, entrants must:

- Hold a Whitefriars' tenancy or license in the three months running up to the prize draw
- Maintain a rent account that is free from arrears, or maintain an agreement, without fail, to reduce a rent arrears debt throughout the three months before the prize draw.

Richard Osborne, Head of Housing Management for Whitefriars North, said the scheme is a great success, adding: "While it is necessary for us to take action against those who fail to ensure their rent is paid, we felt we were failing to acknowledge those who do take their rent seriously. This scheme offers a positive reward and incentive to such tenants."

A list of prize winners is available from Whitefriars' head office, 9 Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 2UR.

Paying your rent

It is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to:

- Pay your rent on time
- Contact the Housing Benefits department at Coventry City Council if your claim is taking a long time
- Make sure you do not build up arrears on your rent account due to non-payment of Housing Benefit
- Make sure you make a claim at the right time - if you delay your claim, it could lead to loss of Housing Benefit

You can pay your rent by:

- Swipe card at any post office or PayPoint outlet
- Standing order
- Paying directly from your employer
- Paying directly from your Housing Benefit
- Calling the debit card phone line on 7676 7070.

Top Tips for Dealing with Debt



Karen Icton, Whitefriars' Operations Manager, said: "If you are having difficulty paying your rent, it is vital that you contact us. If we know you are having problems, we will do our best to help. We will interview you confidentially and discuss how the situation can be resolved. We can help you complete claims for back-dating housing benefit and we can help you with other claims forms and documents."

- Deal with your debt - don't ignore it, otherwise it is likely to continue to mount up
- Talk to someone. There are organisations that can offer you help and advice. The numbers are listed below
- Tell whoever it is you owe money to that you are having problems
- Be realistic about what you can afford to pay back, but appreciate that you need to start somewhere
- Prioritise your debts - if you have debts with more than one person/company, take advice and work out which debt is most important to clear first, and so on

Need help to manage your debt? Try calling:

- The Citizen's Advice Bureau 0845 1202920
- Willenhall Money Advice Centre 7651 1117
- Wood End Money Advice Centre 7661 3629
- Coventry Benefit Advice Line 7683 2000
- Coventry Law Centre 7622 3053
- Housing Benefit, via the Coventry City Council switchboard 7683 3333

Your rights to a good service - The Residents Charter

The booklet included with this edition is produced by the Housing Corporation, the Government body that regulates Whitefriars. It sets out what you can expect from us and checks that you are getting the right services from your housing association. It also tells you what to do if you think Whitefriars is not meeting the standards laid out in the Charter.



The new-look blocks at Ferrers Close

Blocks of colour

Three Tile Hill tower blocks have a new look for the new year, thanks to a partnership between Whitefriars, Wates and residents.

Improvements have been made to the inside and outside of the Ferrers Close blocks. The project, which began in May last year, will be completed in the spring.

Residents have been involved in every aspect of the improvements, and we are planning to develop a

Neighbourhood Agreement with them, to keep their homes and environment in top condition.

Resident Nicola Gill said: "It's a lot better with the increased security via the new doors. Also the new windows have meant I have already saved money on my heating bills."

The project is part of our wider programme to make internal and external improvements to your homes across the city.

Have you seen the new clean machine?

If litter leaves you livid and overgrown grass makes you mad, then take note. As of January 1st, a new and better service has been looking after the grounds of our estates.

From now on, respected national company English Landscapes - the same organisation that looks after the many flowers and planters across Coventry city centre and keeps it tidy - is taking care of all grounds maintenance issues.

For the first three months the company will be familiarising itself with all areas and catching up with the backlog of work on your estates.

Blitzing the estates

The new team will go to every estate to remove litter before cutting the grass and hedges, clear the pavements of grass cuttings, tend to shrub beds, remove rubbish and generally keep them neat.

Trees

Separately, we are carrying out a full tree survey to establish what tree maintenance needs to take place, before deciding how best to tackle it. Further information will be provided via your local offices shortly.

Coming to an area near you

Once the catch-up work is complete, English Landscapes will give each local office a programme outlining the annual routine work that will be done. This means that all households can be informed in advance when the landscape maintenance team will be visiting your area and you will know what to expect.

Help us to help you

We think that English Landscapes will make a real difference to your neighbourhood. To make sure, please help us to help you by being our eyes and ears on the ground. We will be setting up local monitoring groups to check that the work done is up-to-scratch, and we will be asking local residents' groups to get involved. If you are interested in joining a group, or if you have any concerns, please contact your local housing office.

Job opportunities

Not only will this new contract have an impact on your surroundings, but it could make a difference to your employment prospects too. English Landscapes has a few vacancies left to join the landscape maintenance team. If you would like to find out more, contact English Landscapes on 01635 200410.

There will be updates on grounds maintenance in future issues of Home.



English Landscapes already keeps Coventry city centre tidy.





Building work for our first new homes in Tile Hill has begun



Whitefriars' Trainee Building Surveyor, Graham Johnson, is working on his first new-build project with Senior Clerk of Works Ken Pegg and Lovell Site Agent Sean Mimmagh

CHANGING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Coventry's face is changing. We at Whitefriars are committed to meeting the changing needs and hopes of those who live and work in the city, now and in the future.

In 2004, a series of key developments will be taking place. We are delighted to be progressing quickly with building our first new homes in Tile Hill, in partnership with Lovell, and we are well underway with numerous regeneration projects that will bring improved and rejuvenated neighbourhoods across the city.

Here's a taste of some of our development news for the new year.

What you want!

Together with the City Council and other landlords, we commissioned a Housing Demand Study last year to assess how demand for housing in Coventry is changing.

The results of the first stage of research, led by Birmingham University, were discussed at a seminar in November in Coventry, attended by tenants and organisations with an interest in housing issues.

The report included key findings that will help shape the way we - and other housing providers - develop our plans to meet changing desires for homes in Coventry.

The second stage of research has now begun to find out exactly what types of homes local families and individuals want. Focus groups are being interviewed, including tenants, housing applicants, representatives from black and minority ethnic communities, employers and people who have recently moved into Coventry. The final stage of the report will be published in spring 2004.

New homes in Tile Hill

December 2003 marked the start of our building programme when we began work on four new homes in Tile Hill.

In partnership with Lovell, the three-bedroom houses are the first new homes we have built since we took over the housing in 2000. The council last built social housing more than 20 years ago. We have put in a bid to the Housing Corporation for funding to build another 31 homes in Tile Hill, and we expect to hear if we have been successful in the spring.

John Halton, Whitefriars' Head of Surveying and Development, said: "The construction of these new homes reflects people's changing needs and the fact that we are responding to new demands by providing decent, affordable homes in the city. The development has also provided an exciting training opportunity for Whitefriars' staff to work on a new-build project, and to benefit from the knowledge of experienced employees who built social housing as council workers in the 1980s."



The planned new face for Stoke Heath



The regeneration of Hillfields is underway

Regeneration in Stoke Heath

Hillside, Meadway, Valley Road and Common Way are undergoing a huge transformation, as we work in partnership with Wates Construction - and local people - to rejuvenate the area.

We consulted with people living in the immediate and surrounding areas, and we have worked continuously with a residents' steering group. Planning permission was granted in December to build up to 300 new homes, 75 per cent of which will be for sale, and the rest for rent.

People have lived with crime and anti-social behaviour in the area for a long time, and we are confident our plans will help create a desirable and sustainable community which people are happy to call home.

In order to clear the sites, we have now re-housed approximately 85 families after bringing forward the second phase because of residents' concerns over increasing vandalism and arson.

Those who have been re-housed will have priority on returning to the area when the project is complete.

One such former resident is Kate Hughes, who lived in Hillside for 10 years before she was re-housed last August. She now lives in Radford, but is considering moving back to Stoke Heath once the regeneration is complete.

Kate, who chairs the Stoke Heath Community Centre, and is on the residents' steering group, said: "I'm really fond of Stoke Heath, it's got a lot going for it. It has been an upheaval to move, and there is no denying there have been problems with vandals and arsonists, but there is certainly a part of me that would love to move back once the new development is completed."

"The community centre is still open and we have plans to open a community café, which would be a great focus for people to come and have a chat and find out about the new area. I think people do feel daunted about the plans, because it involves a lot of change, but people also realise there are going to be big improvements."

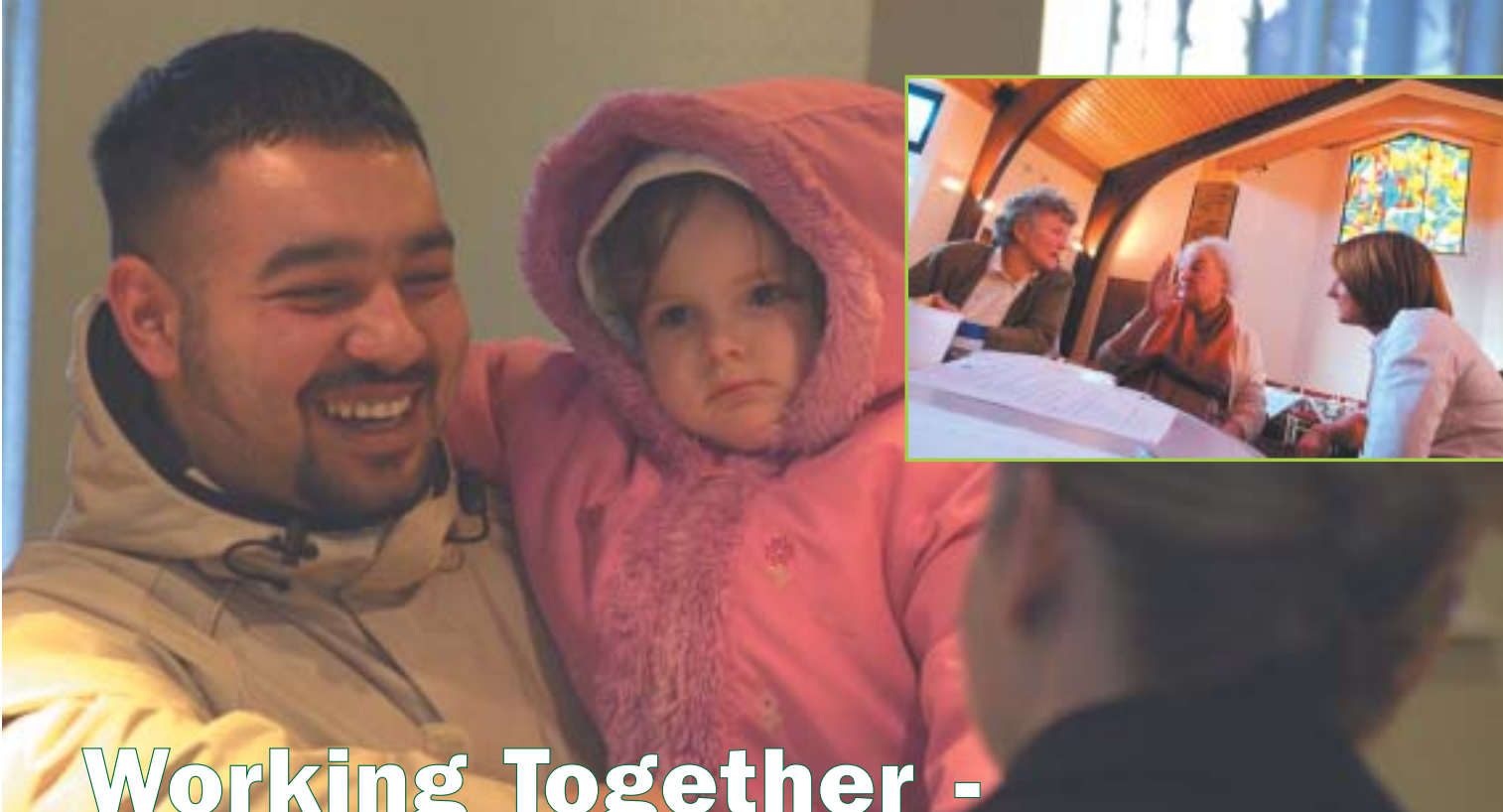
Hillfields

When regeneration is on the agenda, it is inevitable that some difficult decisions have to be made. Hillfields is changing dramatically and it is our view that regeneration - in conjunction with planned redevelopment in other parts of the city - will change it for the better.

Not enough people wanted to live in the Hillfields tower blocks, and we estimate that it would have cost about £3 million to refurbish each one of them. So we took the decision to demolish eight and refurbish the remaining four to a high standard.

The first block - Phoenix House, has already been demolished. Meanwhile, refurbishment is underway at Pioneer House. Flats are being fitted with new kitchens and bathrooms, and there will be improvements to communal areas, which may include new laundries, plus refurbished lifts.

A group of Hillfields residents have formed The Sky View Development Agency, with a view to examining the future of the management of the remaining blocks. The Agency is working with the Birmingham Cooperative Housing Society and Whitefriars on a bid for grant funding to the Housing Corporation to carry out this work.



Working Together - Customer Involvement Feedback

You will know from previous editions of HOME that we have been working with customers to develop methods to involve you more in what we do.

As part of this process, we have been finding out how people want to become involved with us. We have done this by undertaking a wide-ranging consultation, including:

- The Springboard event in April 2003 - which was attended by more than 200 residents
- A survey in the last edition of Home
- Working with representatives from residents' groups and other interested residents to develop a number of the projects favoured in the consultation process.

The consultation outcomes showed support for:

- Customer surveys
- A Tenant Auditor Project
- A representative forum of residents
- Use of plain English in Whitefriars' communications
- Involvement in editing Home
- Ways to encourage more involvement from young people and other under-represented groups
- Help and support for residents groups.

Your views and comments, complaints and compliments remain vital to us in shaping the services we provide for you. The extensive consultation has shown us new ways of working with you, and we have listened to your views and acted upon your suggestions. We are now moving forward to develop the projects that received your support. All of the ways in which customers can get involved with us will be set out in a Tenants' Contract that we will develop with you and publish later in the year. We are also looking to involve residents in setting up service review priorities and undertaking those reviews.

Surveys

Surveys remain a very popular way of involving customers. We have recently undertaken a survey of Black and Minority Ethnic communities in Coventry (see the back page of this newsletter for more information), and in 2004 we will be carrying out a customer satisfaction survey in which approximately 2,000 customers will be asked what they think of our services. The results will help to show us what we are getting right, and, just as importantly, where there is room for improvement.

We have also recently started to survey younger residents to find out how they want to get involved. In particular we are asking them whether they would like to email or text us about the services they receive.

We will update you about this survey of younger tenants in the next edition of Home.

Tenant Auditor Project

We have been working with a group of residents to develop this approach. More than 30 residents have been involved in taster sessions to enable them to find out more about what this kind of project would involve.

WIN A £25 GIFT VOUCHER IT COULD BE YOU!



Malcolm Blower, from Radford, and Doreen Quigley, of Whoberley, were the first two lucky winners in our Customer Survey Prize Draw. Whitefriars' Chairman, Peter Lacy, presented them each with a £25 gift voucher.

Everyone who has had internal improvements carried out at their Whitefriars home is sent a questionnaire called 'Customer Survey - Your Opinions Count.'

Completed forms are entered into the free prize draw, so if you receive a form, fill it in with your comments about the work we have carried out, and you could win a £25 gift voucher.

Your views are important to us and we use the survey results to improve the service we provide when we carry out improvement works with our partnering contractors Wates and Lovell.



CONGRATULATIONS!
to Patricia Randell, of Bell Green, who won a £50 Marks & Spencer voucher after correctly cracking all the puzzles in the Customer Annual Report 2002 - 2003. The prize winner was selected at random from the correct entries.



The first audits took place in January, when tenants posed as mystery customers in local housing offices. They visited and rang the offices, and then reported back on the level of customer service they had received.

We will tell you more about how they got on in the next edition of Home.

Tenant Board Members

The elections held last year saw one change in the Tenant Members of South and Service Board. Joan Allen joined Jim Cotterill and Paul White. Joan is a tenant in Willenhall, is very active in her community and is Secretary of Willenhall Residents Association. She replaces Ellen Emms who had been a Board Member since transfer.

Voices of Whitefriars' Residents

Up to 50 residents have been meeting on Saturday mornings to work on the development of a customer 'forum'. The group decided to name the forum Voices of Whitefriars' Residents (VWR), and they have drawn up a constitution about how they will operate that was agreed by the Whitefriars Services Board in January.

The VWR will promote the views and interests of Whitefriars' residents, act as an advice-giving body, monitor our performance and be involved with developing Whitefriars' services. The Tenant Auditor project will report its findings to the VWR and they will monitor and develop the next stages of the Customer Involvement Strategy.

Members of recognised residents' groups can join VWR, along with people from under-represented groups and individuals from areas where there are no residents' groups. If you want to find out more, or are interested in standing as an individual member, get in touch with us using the contact details below.

Home editorial panel

A group of residents has been meeting to look at the style and content of Home. The group decided to carry out a survey in order to get the views of more readers, so 1,500 questionnaires were sent out with the Customer Annual Report 2002-2003. The panel will also receive editorial training during a series of sessions that started in January.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

If you would like to get involved with any of our activities, or if you have any ideas or want to know more about how you can help us develop the services we provide for you, please contact Lynn Hanson, Whitefriars' Customer Involvement Manager on 7676 7026, or email her on lynn.hanson@whitefriarshousing.co.uk

Crossing Cultures

Coventry is home to residents from a wide range of cultures and communities who have chosen to live in the city.

Last year we carried out a survey of the views of tenants and prospective tenants from our black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

The study is the first of its kind in Coventry, and the largest dedicated BAME survey conducted in the UK. The findings were published earlier this month.

How did we carry out the survey?

There are around 1,600 BAME tenants in the city, and we interviewed almost 1,000 in their own homes. We also set up focus groups and sent out questionnaires. More than 100 of those interviewed were on the housing waiting list, and 30 per cent were aged 34 or under.

Why did we carry out the survey?

To find out what BAME tenants and prospective tenants want and need from housing in Coventry, and to get feedback on our services. We also wanted views on the way we communicate with, and involve our BAME tenants in what we do. The findings will help us shape the way we communicate in future, and help us to plan for housing provision in Coventry.

What did the survey show?

That those who were questioned:

- Are as satisfied with overall landlord services as others are
- Are more satisfied than other tenants with the way their repairs are dealt with
- Are less sure than other tenants that Whitefriars' rent is value for money
- Are less satisfied with the opportunities for participation.

Other findings included:

- BAME tenants share similar concerns with other tenants, for example, anti-social behaviour and demand for repairs
- BAME tenants' concerns are not mainly centred on their ethnic background
- In keeping with other tenants, there is general satisfaction with our services. On some issues there is more satisfaction, e.g. the repairs service
- Most tenants want to stay with Whitefriars and want the organisation to do well. A significant number of tenants (153) want to participate more
- BAME tenants are likely to exercise their Right to Buy, and are more likely to feel we listen to their views.

Help in your own language?

If you would like a copy of Home magazine translated into another language, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL WHITEFRIARS OFFICE.

Punjabi

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ - ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ

Farsi

فارسی - راهنما به زبان شما

Urdu

اردو - آپ کی اپنی زبان میں

Gujarati

ગુજરાતી - તમારી પોતાની ભાષામાં

Bengali

বাংলা - আপনার নিজের ভাষায় সাহায্য পাবেন

French

Aide dans votre langue

Français

Hindi

हिन्दी - आपकी अपनी भाषा में सहायता

Kurdish

کوردی - بارمه تی کوردی به زمانی خوێ

Serbo-croat

Srpsko - hrvatski - pomoć na vašem jeziku

Albanian

Shqip - Ndihmë në gjuhën tuaj

Arabic

اللغة العربية - فكم العون مستخدما لغتك

Want help with this magazine?

If you, or a friend, would like a copy of Home on **audiotape or in a large print format**, call the Communications Team on 024 7676 7029. We want all tenants to know what we are doing on your behalf.

If you have access to the Internet, you can keep up-to-date with what Whitefriars is doing at:

www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk

